Charter Commission Meeting
Town Hall
December 3, 1942
9:30 a.m.--11:40 a.m.

The meeting for the new Charter Commissioners was scheduled to be held at 9:00 a.m. at the Town Hall. By 9:10, almost all the delegates from the blocks were waiting for the meeting to begin. The reason why there was a delay was that an interpreter was needed to assist. It was discovered that Mr. Tom Ozamoto who was supposed to be the interpreter was ill and culd not attend. As a substitute, Mr. Tom Yamazaki was mentioned. Someone was sent to Mr. Yamazaki's home to bring him to the meeting. At 9:30, Mr. Yamazaki arrived.

Mr. Henry Tsurutani, Head of the Legal Aid Department called the meeting to order. He thanked all those who attended and explained that the reason why the meeting was called. It was disclosed that the meeting was called in the absence of Mr. Thomas M. Temple, Chief of the Community Services Division, at his behest. Mr. Frank Hirashima went through the roll call by blocks. The majority of the delegates were present. In all, the meeting was attended by 53 persons including three members of the Administrative personnel: Mr. Merritt, Project Director, Mr. Campbell, Assistant Project Director, and Mr. Robert Brown of the Manzanar Free Press.

Mr. Tsurutani stated that his capacity ended with the opening of the meeting since he was only supposed to perform that duty. He asked that the members elect a chairman to conduct all the business. Someone suggested that Mr. Tsurutani be the chairman, but he bowed out with the statement that he was not a member of the Commission and that only a Commissioner should act as Chairman. Then, the floor was opened for nominations.

The nominees were Messers Murakami, Sugihara, Kuge, Masunaka, and Ozawa. Mr. Murakami declined his nomination. Mr. Sugihara tried to decline, but his declination was not accepted by the Commissioners. At 9:45, ballots were passed around to all the members of the Commission. Then, three men were appointed by Mr. Tsurutani to act as an election board and to count the ballots.

At 9:50, Mr. Tsurutani announced that Mr. Koichi Masunaka was elected to the office of presiding officer. Mr. Masunaka stated that since he could not speak English very well, he would confine his talking to Japanese. He then introduced Mr. Merritt, Project Director.

Mr. Merritt spoke and at intervals, Mr. Tom Yamazaki translated the talk into Japanese. Mr. Merritt stated that this was a meeting to discuss the Community Charter. He said that he has read the reports concerning it at the office and that today, he was there to learn from the people as to how they thought about it. He said that he wanted a frank discussion regarding the conclusions drawn by the people at a meeting which was held two days previously. He also desired to know how the people felt about the Charter as a whole.

Mr. Merritt declared that he had nothing to do with the Charter since he has been on the Project only nine days as a Director. He said that he had nothing to do with the issues raised by the Charter. He had nothing to do with the controversies which arise on the question of having only Nisei holding office or the manner in which the Charter was brought into being. He absolved himself of all issues which have risen because of the Charter very definitely.

Mr. Merritt recognized the fact that some people feel that participation in self-government might be prejudicial to the opportunities and positions in the future of the people so involved. It was stated that the Charter would be only a declaration that the people chose to live and work in a common group. It was pointed out that wherever people live and work together, there is some sort of agreement as to how they would goverumthemselves. As an example, he said that if one goes to Africa, he would find that the tribes would have some sort of a "Head-man" present. In the cities, there is always a Charter or something of that order. One way to evade the entire issue of self-government was pointed out to be a system whereby the people choose to have laws and edicts to be handed down to them without question. That would be one way, but Mr. Merritt felt that government here should be one in which the people are or can be represented.

A tangible reason for the organization of a Council was brought forth. Gifts and books continually come to the Center. These must be accepted by someone. The Government, WRA, or the Center cannot accept them. A Council or a "Head-man" must be present to accept them and then distribute them to the residents of the Center in the best way.

In Manzanar, part of the plan of self-government has already been formed. Mr. Merritt cited the case of the Judicial Committee. He said that it was good except that there was one change in evidence. Mr. Thomas M. Temple, Chief of Community Services, was acting as Chairman. It was pointed out that Mr. Temple would be an advocate of a person before the Committee and being Chairman, he would not be able to speak for the person charged. In the same way (only opposite), a policeman would not be good for a Chairman since the policeman would have to be the prosecutor. In order to represent the Administration, it was felt that either Mr. Merritt or Mr. Campbell should be the presiding officer. Mr. Merritt decided that Mr. Campbell will hereafter act as presiding officer for the Judicial Committee. Mr. Merritt mentioned the fact that the Judicial Committee has passed judgment and has sent people to jail and has taken drivers' licenses away from a few of the people.

In a similar way, the Manzanar Work Corps is a part of self-government. By such an organ, the workers can discuss problems which may arise. That is a way by which all workers can discuss matters with the administration.

These are some of the ways of working together, but the people of Manzanar must have a common agreed method of governing themselves. The WRA believes that the governing of the people living and working together should be done by the residents themselves. Mr. Merritt stated that he was not at the meeting to discuss small things such as who is to run the Council or who should have the right to hold offices. He was there to determine whether the people of Manzanar should decide the method of living and working together or whether the orders should be given to the people of Manzanar. This was all up to the people themselves to decide. The big question is how the people of Manzanar is to live together and how policies or regulations should be presented to the people.

The Charter has been under discussion for a long time. About a month ago, the Charter was supposed to be put to a vote, but this has not come to pass. Mr. Merritt said, "The time for talking has gone by and the time for action has come!" Mr. Merritt reiterated that he wanted a frank and open discussion and that that which is said will not be held against the person who says it. He wanted to hear the personal views of the people and the views of the block members.

Mr. Merritt had three points which he wanted the members of the Commission to discuss.

1. He wanted to know how many people felt that the Charter should be submitted to the people as it stands at the present.
2. He wanted to know which group felt that the present Charter could be acceptable if there are changes and amendments made to it. These changes would have to be within the limits of the Project Director's powers and would have to be in recognizance of Washington rulings.
3. He wanted to know whether people felt it not wise to bring out any kind of a charter. He wanted to know whether it would be acceptable to put the Charter to the vote of the people of Manzanar.

Mr. Merritt pointed out that if the Charter should be voted down by the people, it would be up to the Project Director to determine how the people are to live. The voting down of the Charter would be a method of passing the buck to the Project Director. Of course, there will be no hard feelings if such a thing does occur, but Mr. Merritt would really want to know what is to be done. He urged the Commissioners to really come out with their statements and be perfectly frank in their discussion. If the Charter is not accepted, the Project Director will issue a fair plan of a community system of government which can be found in any community.

It was declared that the administration does not like people to talk too much and reach conclusions which might be harmful to the future life of the Japanese people. Discussion of such a nature, if carried toofar, might prove to be dangerous. Mr. Merritt stated that he wanted to have people protected; he wanted to see that the future will be well-protested. He said that he does not want acts in the Center to jeopardise the futuse of the people. He wanted to lay a little more stress and emphasise the last point. In this

Camp, people have been threatened. Mr. Merritt attributed such actions to the emotions of some people, but he cautioned that the people outside have emotions just as strong if not stronger. That Poston incident would affect the entire population of both Issei and Nisei. Such occurences could be avoided by common understanding and by thorough discussion.

Mr. Merritt said that he cannot talk to 10,000 people; however, he can meet with representatives of the 10,000. He told the Commissioners to remember that the Charter would be an organ of representation and for discussion.

The Project Director stated that he holds for tolerance and goodwill among all mankind; however, he also added that tolerance is very difficult to acquire. He then told an anecdote of a situation which followed the last World War. At that time, the University of California would not consent to the appropriation of funds to continue the studies and teaching of the German language. Mr. Merritt held that education cannot be limited or restricted in such a fashion. If it were, the doors of education might as well close. Finally, the appropriation was passed by three votes.

In conclusion, Mr. Merritt restated his three points as follows:

1. Do you want this Charter as it stands?
2. Do you want to add amendments to the Charter?
3. Do you think that the Charter should not be made or accepted?

At 10:40 a.m. Mr. Masunaka, the presiding officer of the meeting thanked Mr. Merritt for his talk. Then, he tried to explain the three points brought forth by Mr. Merritt. From the floor, someone asked that the discussion be conducted in the American method (motion, second, discussion, and question) rather than in the Japanese fashion of bringing up the same or similar points time and time again. Another person asked if there was any method by which the Block Managers should be given more power. Mr. Merritt answered that point by stating that there was a way but that way is not acceptable in the United States. It was pointed out that the Block Managers are appointed and are paid by the administration and that they do not represent the point of view of the people in the blocks. Mr. Merritt said that he believed that the Block Managers should get a little more power and authority.

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Mr. Merritt declared that the Block Manager system/method of government, but it is not self-government. The Block Managers are not representative of the people since they are appointed by the administration.

Mr. Yoki of Block 14 stood up to state that the block which he represents does not favor the charter. This was not because they oppose it just for the opposing. This was not because they are dissatisfied. This was not because they are against the United States. The people of Block 14 have the fullest confidence in the administrative officers. They recognize the high calibre of such a man as

Mr. Temple. They have confidence in Mr. Merritt. Mr. Ioki stated that the people whom he represents do not believe in self-government; they feel that they cannot have self-government without freedom. They felt that the conditions of freedom do not exist here with the barb-wire fences and all. They feel that the Charter will not fulfill the responsibilities. They believe that a negotiating committee can be formed to displace the Charter system. The former Block Leader type of government was, in their estimation, representative of the people.

Mr. Merritt voiced his opinion that if the Charter should be voted down, the people outside would get the impression that the people in Manzanar repudiated their rights for self-government. He again reiterated that the future of all the people would be jeopardized if a bad type of discussion is carried too far.

Mr. Ioki stated that any type of violence and threats of violences blots and besmirches the national honor and all such occurrences are shameful to everyone. He mentioned that they are the outbreaks of dissatisfaction. He again appealed to Mr. Merritt to make a negotiating committee.

Mr. Merritt asked whether the three points stated previously should be considered or whether the discussion on the Charter should be laid aside for a time. He said that he wondered if it would not be a good idea that guided by the general attitude and lack of enthusiasm, the discussion on the Charter be tabled until more can be learned of the situation. He suggested the discussion of the creation of a temporary group to get at the basis of dissatisfaction. Then, after that part is ironed out, return to the Charter and resume work on it. Then, Mr. Merritt put it up to the people present to determine what should be done next.

Mr. Masunaka asked the general assemblage the next line of action.

From the floor, someone asked whether the Charter was made with retard to provisos from Washington or whether the former original committee made up the Charter themselves. Mr. Henry Tsurutani referred to Administrative Order #34 and read a couple of sections which were included in the Charter. Mr. Ioki and Mr. Masunaka then talked a little bit about things.

Mr. Tateishi moved that the meeting be postponed in order that the Commissioners could go back to the blocks which they represent and discuss the Charter further with the block residents. He stated that most of the people (both at the meeting and away) do not know the Charter yet. Some of the people have not even read the Charter. He asked that the Chairman postpone the meeting and appoint a committee to meet with the administration.

From the floor, someone interrupted to say that a provision should be made so that the people of Manzanar could have the power to recall any administrative officer. He said that such a provision would create more interest of the people.

The Chairman declared that he felt that the discussion of the Charter should be postponed. This was followed by a discussion involving four people.

Mr. Merritt stated that it would be acceptable if the meeting should adjourn for two or three days. He urged the Commissioners to read or re-read the Charter and to see some of the people on the original Charter Commission. He asked whether or not it would be advisable for the Project Director to provide a legislature to discuss common problems out of which can come a more permanent organization. He suggested that the meeting be adjourned and that no committee be formed. The whole body and others who might be interested can meet again soon to re-discuss the matter. He stated that he doesn't want to see a vote taken until the people can see what the thing is all about and what the vote involves.

Upon request from the floor, it was decided that the Administrative Order #34 will be distributed to each of the Commissioners.

At 11:40 a.m., the meeting was adjourned. The next meeting was slated to be held at the Town Hall, Thursday, December 10, 1942, at 9:00 a.m.

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